

NOTiCIAS DEL OSO

December 2, 2009

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I hope all of you are refreshed and ready to make these last 3 weeks before the winter break useful - even if our students are not.

In keeping with that idea, I hope that this newsletter will be useful to you in the classroom with teaching your ESL students. One question that many of the teachers had last week when I visited everyone's team meetings was how to get our ESL students - who have a limited argument to begin with - up to grade level vocabulary for each TAKS area.

While I can certainly throw vocab into my English and reading classes, there are better ways for our ELLs to learn content-area academic vocabulary: in class.

Erin Van Sickle

Vocabulary Versatility

As I alluded to in the introduction, the very best way for students to learn any sort of vocabulary is during the application, in the correct context. For students to truly learn vocabulary words out of context - in an ESL classroom, for example - they need to do 3-4 times as much work.

These vocabulary strategies are some of the most effective for our English Language Learners, but you also might find them useful for the general classroom as well.

Picturing perfection...

It may seem terrifyingly obvious, but ESL students learn best from a combination of words and pictures together. It allows them to use their developing vocabulary while filling in the blanks that their language barrier creates with the pictorial representations.

One model that I use more often than the curriculum requires is the Frayer model because it gives them the opportunity to create their own graphic representation. The main drawback is the time this model takes for ELLs. The teacher needs to walk them through the development of this process.

Instead, for busier days, I have created a different model that allows students to see a handout with a teacher-created drawing and sentence to combine the skills of context clues and visual predictions to help them create their own definition. Once they have crafted a student-friendly definition, they create their own picture and accompanying sentence to allow the instructor to check for understanding.

In their own words...

The best way for an ELL to learn is through repetition and practice in as many forms as possible. If we can get our students both speaking and writing about the vocabulary, they'll get accustomed to the words much quicker.

Have students write a short speech or paragraph using as many words and word forms from the week or unit's vocabulary list as possible. This can simply be in a bell ringer or as an exit ticket. If it's the last thing that our kiddos think about on the way out the door, they should be able to recall it.

Another way to truly ingrain the information in an ESL student is by challenging them to change the original usage of the word. English Language Learners tend to stick to the one main or "safe" defi-

tion like it's a security blanket, which is why they will often use root words or incorrect modifications of words in papers and conversation. It's not always that they don't understand that it's supposed to be different, it's that their teachers have not been challenging them to take the next step and alter the usage.

One way that I encourage modification is to simply give them a list of sentences using the vocabulary words and ask them to give me a completely new paragraph using the vocabulary words that all adds up to the same meaning. After modeling this process a couple of times, all of my classes have a wonderful grasp of the concept and compete with one another to make the most creative paragraph.

Requiring the students to use the words as many times as possible is the key to ELL students learning the academic language, just as any other student benefits from repetition.

Location, location, location

Despite all my promises of an entirely vocabulary-themed newsletter, this particular strategy is useful for any kind of language acquisition issue. Though it may be tempting to place an ELL at the front of the room with other high-needs individuals, much of the recent research has shown that if an English Language Learner is allowed to sit near high-achievers, they will improve their vocabulary (both social and academic) at a rate 15% higher than simply getting the teacher's close attention.

Please consider this when doing groupings or pairings, if an ELL does not understand a vocabulary concept at first, they will be much more willing to accept help from a knowledgeable peer before admitting to the teacher that they need additional assistance.

Also, placing them near a student who is familiar with the vocabulary concepts gives them more of a chance to hear the words used correctly in the context of the assignments. ELL students do take solace in being near other language learners, however in many cases this does not offer a large enough benefit to keep them apart from a higher level student.

Try these strategies out - next semester there will be yet another vocabulary strategies week with completely different suggestions.

ESL Student of the Week



Name: Jesus Delgado

Grade: 8th

First language: Spanish

Fun personality fact: Jesus always comes into my class with a huge smile on his face. As I've learned, the smile is his tell. When his smile disappears, I know he's confused.